



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

March 4, 2020

National advice on liturgical implications in light of coronavirus (COVID-19)

With a relatively small number of confirmed cases of coronavirus or COVID-19 in Australia, the risk to the general public remains low. However, given the regular assembly of large groups for liturgical celebrations and a number of enquiries from dioceses, parishes and individuals, the following advice is provided for dioceses and parishes to consider.

This advice should be considered alongside local and national health guidance, including from the [Commonwealth Department of Health \(https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert\)](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert).

This advice, prepared in collaboration with the National Office for Liturgy and Catholic Health Australia, follows earlier communication from the Bishops Conference to dioceses on January 31.

A number of dioceses and parishes have already issued guidelines relevant to their local context. This national advice, drafted in light of those guidelines, should be read in conjunction with those local documents.

The following recommendations are believed to be proportionate to the current understanding of the coronavirus and the risks outlined by health authorities. They are consistent with the Catholic Church's prerogative to protect those who are most vulnerable.

- Individuals should consider their own health, including any potential to infect others with a contagious disease, before attending a public liturgical celebration.
- Holy Water should be temporarily removed from stoups at the doors of churches to reduce the possibility of transmission of the virus. Holy Water should continue to be available for people to take home.
- Parishes and other settings where liturgies are celebrated should make alcohol-based gels or rubs (or like products) available near entrances. Similar provisions should be considered for settings used for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- When exchanging the Sign of Peace, individuals should avoid shaking hands but say "Peace be with you" and offer a smile, wave, nod or bow.
- All Ministers of Holy Communion should take particular care to wash their hands before and after distributing. Appropriate means should be made available.
- Parishes should cease distributing Holy Communion from the Chalice until further notice. The faithful should be reminded that Christ is fully present under either species.
- The coronavirus is easily spread through saliva. In celebrations of the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, it is therefore recommended that the Body of Christ only be administered in the hand because of the high risk of transmission if people continue to receive on the tongue. Ministers should seek to avoid contact with the communicant's hands.
- The faithful who are too unwell to attend Sunday Mass – whether due to coronavirus or some other condition – or are at particular risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus can honour their Sunday obligation by participating in a time of prayer within the home, reading the Scriptures or watching Mass on television or [online \(http://bit.ly/MassOnDemand\)](http://bit.ly/MassOnDemand).

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Catholics may be reassured that, should they contract COVID-19 and become seriously ill, priests will continue to ensure they receive the sacraments and other appropriate pastoral care.

Pastors and other Church leaders are encouraged to communicate their relevant advice with the faithful clearly and appropriately.

Individuals should follow the advice of local health authorities when conducting services in hospitals and aged care facilities, as well as those who conduct pastoral visits to other settings, including people's homes, prisons and detention centres.

Other Catholic ministries, including schools and hospitals, will communicate with their own communities based on the advice they receive and their local circumstances.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will continue to monitor advice from health authorities and other episcopal conferences. This advice will be updated as and when appropriate.

This document has been prepared with due consideration for the advice from by the Commonwealth Department of Health. [Click here](#) to access its coronavirus information page.

Contact your local diocesan office for more information about the liturgical practices relevant to your community. Find out more at www.catholic.org.au/dioceses